

NOVEMBER 2021

# Christian Health Care Newsletter

## Sufferers of invisible illnesses urge others to try to understand

By Andie Dill



(iStock)

**ON MARCH 4, 1988,** Tim collapsed at work.

That day marked the beginning of a 17-year ordeal for him, his wife of 13 years, and their five young children. He had become easily fatigued in the months leading up to the collapse. Now he was in bed 24 hours a day, physically aching, unable to do anything for himself. Life was going on around him, and his children were growing up without his involvement.

Brittany was 24 when she became sick, enduring pain, fatigue, and brain fog so severe that the past several years are unclear.

Amy has battled the fallout of a case of the Epstein-Barr virus for most of her adult life.

These Samaritan Ministries members suffer from invisible illnesses

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Samaritan™  
MINISTRIES

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Stand firm in the evil day

### Member Letters:

NOTES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT  
ENCOURAGE COUPLE

Since joining Samaritan Ministries, we have had three medical emergencies. The medical bills were all discounted and we have been helped by our brothers and sisters in Christ to pay them in full. The notes along with the Shares encouraged us and helped us heal from these disruptive emergencies.

Joining Samaritan Ministries has been a tremendous blessing and it gives us joy to send our shares each month along with a card and prayers. I can honestly say we never felt that way sending our monthly amount to a health insurance company.

**Brian and Karen  
CALIFORNIA**

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## Noteworthy | From the Editors

*"For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him..."—Romans 1: 21a*

A lack of thankfulness is the most basic indication that mankind has turned away from God. The rest of Romans 1 reveals what happens when we are not thankful to Him and seek other sources for what we think we are lacking.

It is God's will that we give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Sometimes we will have trouble doing this and must make an intentional decision to give thanks anyway. When we develop this practice, we can rebuild what was destroyed at the beginning.

A thankful spirit shows that we recognize and trust in God's goodness and control in our lives in every situation. He surrounds us with His love. He is all we need.

As we observe a special Day of Thanksgiving to God this month, let's determine to make a habit of remembering God's goodness and giving thanks to Him every moment of every day, all year long.



Ray King  
**EDITOR EMERITUS**

## Helpful Resources

### ► Facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin

Reach out to other members in our Facebook Group.

### ► Important emails

Medical Needs: [needs@samaritanministries.org](mailto:needs@samaritanministries.org)

Sending or receiving Shares: [membership@samaritanministries.org](mailto:membership@samaritanministries.org)

Your membership: [membership@samaritanministries.org](mailto:membership@samaritanministries.org)

### ► Health Resources App | Dash.SamaritanMinistries.org

- Compare quality and cost of health care services in your area using Healthcare Bluebook. Receive a \$250 reward when you submit a screenshot showing you chose a green fair-price provider.
- Use MediBid to receive bids from doctors for tests or treatments you are seeking.
- Email a medical professional or call a nurse (free), or call a doctor who can write a prescription (\$25).
- Access discount tools for prescriptions and lab tests.

### ► Writers guidelines: [samaritanministries.org/writers-guidelines](http://samaritanministries.org/writers-guidelines)

that have sapped their strength and challenged their faith over the years. They hope to help others better understand chronic illness and to encourage and comfort brothers and sisters enduring similar challenges.

### **Tim: Finding the good**

Tim's condition baffled doctors at first. For 10 months, specialists ran tests on every system in his body, finding each a "little off." Testing ruled out several major diseases, but nothing pointed to a root cause. The Centers for Disease Control had only first identified and named chronic fatigue syndrome the same month that Tim had collapsed. As a result, his diagnosis came through a long process of eliminating every other likely cause.

His illness now had a name, but he still struggled to see its purpose.

"It is very hard when you feel like you're dying to see the good in it," Tim says. "It's not until later, when looking back, that you can see the good that God has had in it."

Tim got so low at one point that he did not have strength or faith to pray anymore and asked others to do it for him.

"It felt like God did not care," Tim says. "My prayers and others' prayers were not being answered, at least in what I desired—relief."

Adding spiritual pain to his physical pain, the pastors and elders at Tim's church told him that the illness must have been due to unconfessed sin in his life. When no sin could be identified, the church leaders stopped visiting him.

"They believed that this illness

was all in my head," Tim says. "It hurt that they believed I was not really sick. But we remembered that Jesus forgave those who wrongly accused Him, and He helped us forgive them."

Tim's condition gradually improved. After a couple years, when he could be up for five minutes at a time, he would sit at the piano, teach himself to play, and worship the Lord. Because Tim was at home for so many years, God gave him a special place in the lives of his children. He worked with his wife to homeschool and disciple them. Today all five children walk with and love the Lord.

And years later, when Tim had recovered, the elders came to him and apologized for all they had said and done.

"When people don't believe you, and you're not getting well, it is not easy to keep hoping, but it's important that you do," Tim says. "Don't lose hope. It's not easy to always be ill, but our hope is in the Lord, not our physical condition. And, like Job said, 'Though He slay me, I will hope in Him' (Job 13:15)."

### **Brittany: Living in a fog**

At 24 years old, Brittany was a healthy, active woman. But in 2012, while weeding the yard, Brittany inhaled poison-ivy spores. Spots started showing up all over her body, leading to the need for prednisone shots. Eventually, her adrenal glands stopped working, and she was put on synthetic cortisol for two years.

The following year, Brittany still was not doing well and tested positive for Lyme disease.

For several years, Brittany

battled brain fog so severe she sometimes had trouble speaking and finding words. She suffered all-over body and joint pain as well as severe fatigue. Antibiotics and other treatments left her bedridden.

Protocols such as various intravenous treatments that worked for others did not work for Brittany. Plans to travel to Germany for treatments were canceled when she was diagnosed with autoimmune encephalitis caused by mold toxicity, a condition she developed after her family moved to a new home in 2017.

After that house tested positive for mold, Brittany and her family moved into a hotel. A family at their church graciously allowed them to move into an apartment at their home, but that location also had mold. They had to move yet again and get rid of nearly all their possessions due to mold contamination.

Brittany lost a year of treatment and had to essentially restart her treatment for mold toxicity.

Today, Brittany is 34, but her memory is so fuzzy that she has trouble remembering much of the past eight or nine years. Her family has been a rock for her, she said, as it's been difficult to keep up many friendships or relationships. Until recently, she was often too ill to even attend church in person. And her dreams of becoming a young wife and mother, as well as enjoying her 20s and single life, have slipped away.

A recent surgery that helped lessen the pressure in her brain and

*continued on page 4*

reduce overall inflammation has helped Brittany, who is doing better now than she has in several years. But she still has a long way to go.

"It's hard for people who have not walked through chronic illness to understand," Brittany says. "It's not like cancer, where your hair falls out and everybody can see. Many aspects of the illness can be invisible, and that is incredibly isolating."

She wants to help others understand more about chronic illness.

"With invisible illness, you look fine on the outside, but on the inside, you're not well," Brittany says. "There are aspects of invisible illness that can seem odd."

"The Church has come a long way, but there is still a need for believers to open up their minds a little bit more."

To those blessed with good health, she says, "Be thankful that you have not had to experience any of it. Take the blessings that God has given you and pay it forward. Invest in kids with disabilities or someone in the church who is not as active because of invisible illness. Do not take for granted what God has given you, because there are a lot of people out there who suffer daily in silence."

A passage that Brittany has clung to in her journey is 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For



Read six things you need to know about chronic illness at [bit.ly/chronic-illness-6](https://bit.ly/chronic-illness-6)

the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

"I know God is using and will use these trials," Brittany says. "For now, I press on and continue to hope and pray for healing, and ultimately that my life will glorify God."

#### **Amy: Never 100 percent**

During her college years, Amy came down with a severe case of mononucleosis, an illness that can be caused by Epstein-Barr virus (EBV).

Most people who get mono recover and never have another problem with the virus. However, 30 years later, Amy is still fighting the illness. EBV goes through active and inactive phases, sometimes causing Amy to feel like she has mono again for several months at a time. Her body is unable to keep the virus in the "inactive phase" because of an underlying immune deficiency. Amy is married and has raised two daughters, but she has never felt 100 percent.

"Chronic illness is full of lots of loneliness, isolation, and heartache," Amy states. "There is also a lot of pretending—making myself come off as a normal, healthy

person to be accepted despite not feeling well."

However, Amy has been able to reflect on the good things and the hope that God has given her throughout her journey.

"I have spent a lot of time reading and searching Scripture to learn about suffering, and God has been teaching me a lot about Himself and about myself," Amy says. "I rejoice in the times I feel good, and work through the times when I don't. God has given me a lot of compassion for those who suffer because of having gone through it myself."

When healthy people interact with someone with chronic illness, Amy recommends asking open-ended questions, and really listening to the answers. She suggests such phrases as "That sounds challenging" or "Can you tell me more about that?" or "How can I pray for you this week?"

Amy says Mark 14:3-9 has encouraged her over the years, specifically verse 8, in which Jesus defends the woman who anointed Him with the alabaster flask of expensive ointment and says, "She has done what she could." ♦♦♦

Andie Dill is a Communications Specialist at Samaritan Ministries.

## Member Spotlight

# Jennifer Bond Baker: composer, pianist

by Andie Dill

### Member Jennifer Bond Baker

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**AFTER DECADES OF** suffering pain, professional pianist and composer Jennifer Bond Baker (Jennifer-BondBaker.com) was diagnosed in 2020 with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), specifically hEDS, which is a hypermobile—and the most common—form of the illness. EDS is a connective tissue disorder that mainly affects the elbows and knees as well as other joints, leaving victims prone to accidents and causing slow healing and joint pain.

Today God is using this illness to point others to Christ through Jennifer's music and testimony. Her new CD, *Take My Hand*, was composed for "comfort and occupation," she says. She dedicated it to "all who suffer with chronic illness or disability" and those who care for them.

### Illness a 'calling'?

Jennifer still remembers how offended she felt the day a friend called and asked her whether she felt God had given her a calling through her diagnosis with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.

"I could not believe it. My friend was asking if I felt this unthinkable illness could be a calling from God to minister to others," Jennifer says. "I was so offended initially. But



(Supplied photo)

after a while, I came to realize that, yes, perhaps God has allowed this illness in my life as a means to serve Him and tell others about Jesus."

"I see countless doctors, ther-

apists, and other medical personnel," Jennifer says. "Many of them are not Christians, so I have been

*Continued on page 6*

given an opportunity to witness to these men and women by both sharing the Lord with them and showing them that, though I am suffering greatly, I have a peace and a hope.”

### **Music for others’ benefit and God’s glory.**

Just weeks after Jennifer received an explanation for her symptoms, COVID-19 hit the U.S. and the country locked down. Initially, Jennifer was glad. She could just stay home and rest, along with the rest of the world.

“I was so relieved to just get a break,” Jennifer says. “Now I did not have to try and make excuses or constantly explain why I could not do everything or go out all the time. I only worked two days a week, but even that was too much. I was so glad to be sent home and told to stay inside.”

However, after some time, the feelings of relief turned to feelings of gloom when Jennifer lay in bed day after day, grieved by the grim news reports on TV, feeling crummy herself, and having little to no social interaction.

“I started to feel swallowed in depression, and I asked God, ‘What’s next for me?’” Jennifer says.

“I realized, though, that God was providing so much for me. Many people I knew were unable to see their doctors during this time, but my doctor faithfully let me come in. Throughout the whole shutdown, I never missed a treatment or appointment.”

During this time Jennifer also regained enough strength to get back to the piano. She found herself using her talents to

compose music as a way to quiet her heart during her physical and emotional trial.

It started by writing one piece, then two, then an entire album, *Take My Hand*, which she dedicated to “all sufferers of chronic illness and to those who keep them in life’s dance!”

The album is available at [JenniferBondBaker.com/shop](http://JenniferBondBaker.com/shop).

“I caught a vision for an album that would give me and others joy in the midst of sorrow,” Jennifer says.

Now she has plans to compose a Christmas album and an album of hymns.

### **Growing up with questions.**

It was not until 2020, at the age of 45, that Jennifer finally received answers to her many questions about the ailments and symptoms she had suffered for decades.

EDS is a genetic connective tissue disorder that Jennifer was born with, but nobody knew what was wrong with her, despite her countless trips to doctors, specialists, and any other resource she could find. Worse than not having answers for her symptoms, these doctors often made Jennifer feel crazy and like her illness was imagined.

As a child, Jennifer had a few

## **I caught a vision for an album that would give me and others joy in the midst of sorrow.**

more broken bones and seemed clumsier than the average child, but nonetheless she lived a fairly normal life. In high school she noticed regular bouts of fatigue, but she was young, and she could always “get through it.”

Once she was in her 20s, she also began to experience periods of unexplained pain and relentless fatigue. Shortly after she gave birth to her two children two years apart, the illness began to take its toll.

“This illness is invisible,” Jennifer says. “On the outside, I looked like everyone else. But in actuality, I spent quite a lot of time in bed, could barely use my arms for anything, and had to stop picking up my children. Later, it would affect my foot to the degree that I could barely walk without assistance.”

“Time and time again, all my X-rays and scans came back normal. Doctors would tell me there was nothing wrong with me. I was misdiagnosed with fibromyalgia, arthritis, and more. And yet, I could hardly function,” Jennifer says.

“Typically, when you use your body in daily activities, you create micro tears in the tissue. You’ve experienced this when you’ve worked out too hard or long and feel sore muscles the next day. Someone with EDS will have far more tissue damage and require far more rest for that tissue to repair.”

### **A dream of the past.**

Jennifer loved music and was once a pianist, playing for homeschool groups, churches, choirs, and other programs. But at one point, she could not even sit at the piano and move her fingers across the keys.

Her whole life was crumbling

## Why Samaritan Ministries?

Jennifer Baker, her husband, Brian, and their two children became members of Samaritan Ministries in 2014 after her husband realized their insurance dollars were going to fund abortions.

"When we realized that our insurance was covering abortions, we knew we wanted to get out of it and support something much better," Jennifer says.

Brian had been facing several hurdles to maintain their insurance plan through his employer when they made the switch to Samaritan Ministries.

"It has simply been wonderful. We just love getting the notes and prayers. The personal touch is so lovely," Jennifer says.

Overall, the Bakers have been blessed during their years with the Samaritan community and plan to "never go back," Jennifer says.

"We are so happy with Samaritan and tell people about it all the time," Jennifer says. "I have even linked the Samaritan Ministries website from my website so people can learn more about you guys!" ♦♦♦

before her eyes. Thus began 20 years of searching for answers.

### **A glimmer of hope.**

In 2019, Jennifer had ankle surgery, which further wrecked her body and left her in debilitating pain. She continued to question why all these things were happening. The last several years had been especially lonely years, as her children had graduated and left home, and the community around her and her husband had changed.

However, a providential encounter in January 2020 finally gave her a diagnosis and the validation that she was not crazy.

"It was after yet another painful,

failed, physical therapy attempt that my observant naturopath said, "I think you may have Ehlers-Danlos syndrome," Jennifer recalls.

It was soon confirmed by a specialist.

"My diagnosis came at age 45, which is an awfully long time to live with a genetic disorder and not know it," Jennifer says.

She uses different therapies and takes a variety of oral remedies to reduce the pain.

"God has really answered prayer," Jennifer says. "I'm walking now, something I haven't been able to do freely for four years. I'm back to grocery shopping, something I stopped for two years. A change

in my meds really helped, and, I believe, God has been gracious to answer the prayers of many saints.

"The difficult thing has been trying to determine what works and what doesn't. That takes a lot of time."

### **Ehlers-Danlos Society.**

Jennifer is grateful for the Ehlers-Danlos Society, especially the resources she has found there and connections she has made. She hopes to use proceeds from her albums to support the society and other organizations like it.

Jennifer has been able to share her music with other believers for their own comfort and encouragement, and she hopes to connect with other EDS patients to share her music and her Lord with them, too.

### **How to pray for Jennifer.**

- For endurance, perseverance, and more resources as she lives with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.
- For strength as she continues to compose music for God's glory.
- For further awareness of those suffering with EDS and with "invisible illness."
- For opportunities for Jennifer to connect with other EDS patients and community in general. ♦♦♦

Andie Dill is a Communications Specialist with Samaritan Ministries.

# Samaritan Facebook Group

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**Hannah, CO**

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Hello SM community! I wanted to share a sweet photo of my beautiful boy, Uriah Timothy. He was born on 05/30/2021 in a really positive and fast birth! Our joyous pregnancy experience wouldn't have been possible without you all. My husband and I have felt so loved by this community. Thank you!

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**Keith, IN**

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It has been so humbling to receive the prayers and support financially after my recent cancer surgery. To witness the compassion and support from so many is overwhelming. Thank you so much, Samaritan and members.

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**Racheal, MO**

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Four years ago today, my heart spontaneously tore! I was taken by ambulance from an urgent care facility to a hospital, where I was told the heart surgeon was 15 minutes away. "We are going to start prepping you for open heart surgery." I had a double bypass and spent five days in the hospital. My heart surgeon told me my recovery was amazing. I have a 6½-inch scar down the middle of my chest.

But I have LIFE! I'm here for my husband and 10 kids. Thank you, Samaritan Ministries members, for helping us with this large bill. In the picture, I just did a very brisk three-mile walk.

The full name of my heart event is spontaneous coronary artery dissection. I'm now in a study at the Mayo Clinic for my rare event.

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**Shannon, SC**

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We recently submitted a Special Prayer Need for our daughter, who recently went through an expensive dental procedure. As members, we understand it's not shareable as a regular Need. However, today I went to my mailbox and was moved to tears by the cards, prayers, and checks to help aid in our burden. To know that there are several members praying for our daughter is priceless! I know they probably wouldn't want to be recognized, but God has put this on my heart to thank them by first names only. Thank you to Kurt, Jennifer, Nancy, Rhetha, and Maureen for today's provision and encouragement!! With a GRATEFUL heart we appreciate your gifts of kindness! We love our Samaritan family!

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### Jill, TN

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Thank you all for being part of our family's support system as we walked this road with Gabe. Being a Samaritan member was a HUGE blessing to us during this process.

Tuesday is his last big chemo treatment and port removal surgery. We appreciate all the prayers!

This kid here in the shark tooth necklace has his LAST chemo vincristine infusion, spinal tap with methotrexate, steroid burst (5 days of pills) and his final surgery to remove his port this Tuesday. Please pray for a smooth surgery and pray for our whole family as we transition to having a cancer SURVIVOR!!! We are so proud of Gabe and his joyful spirit even during a very challenging few years. Walking beside him as his mama really has been an honor.

Following Tuesday's procedure, Gabe will continue on his oral chemo meds for about 5 more weeks and then will officially end all treatment on September 20th. As our oncologist explained, it will be as simple as one day him taking his chemo pill and the next day not.

Thank God for sustaining us through these last two years and thank God for sweet Gabriel Robert's life. We can't wait to see what is in store for this child.



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### Margaret, ID

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We just gave birth to our third baby as members of Samaritan, and things couldn't have gone better. We have been so blessed to have our Needs shared each time. I wish I could personally thank each member who has ministered to us with Shares, notes, and prayers. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Here is a picture of our newest blessing



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### Karen, MT

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What a remarkable Facebook Group this is! I am encouraged by reading the thoughtful, caring responses. I am 65 years young and had the privilege of being healthy for decades. Now, I am dealing with Stage 4 cancer. I have had to accept that I am not invincible and I cannot do it all by myself. Asking for help has always been hard for me and still is, if I am honest.

Receiving the notes, letters, cards, and drawings from members has been such a HUGE blessing to me. I know I am not the only one who has a hard time receiving, but you all make it much easier. A big THANK YOU to such a wonderful community. God bless you all!!

Being a part of this ministry is a blessing all of the way around.

**Praise God for His mighty provision!**  
If you're on Facebook and haven't joined the Samaritan Ministries Community yet, please consider doing so!

[facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin](https://facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin)

## Member story

# Husband's COVID-19 case reinforced wife's trust in God and focus on prayer

by Kathryn Nielson

Division around virus reminds us to stay focused on Christ

**MY 49-YEAR-OLD HUSBAND,** Bruce, contracted COVID-19 a year after the outbreak, a year after wearing masks and quarantining, and weeks after the general population had started inching their way back to “normal life” like a bear coming out of a winter-long hibernation.

Four of us came down with the illness over a weekend. My mom, daughter, and I experienced mild cold-like symptoms and the highly annoying but non-life-threatening loss of taste and smell.

My husband wasn't so fortunate. His COVID-19 involved a worsening sore throat and chronic cough that eventually led to two emergency department visits and, finally, hospital admittance.

While I was concerned, acquaintances who had gotten sick from the virus had experienced anything from a day of not feeling well to severe cold symptoms at most. Bruce's age also gave me confidence that this wasn't going to be a huge deal for him. Even after he was admitted to the hospital because he needed oxygen, I wasn't very concerned because I knew it wasn't uncommon for people to sometimes need a day or two in the hospital to get their oxygen levels back up.

But when the 5 liters he was getting didn't help, I got scared.

I received the dreaded middle-of-the-night phone call informing me they were transferring him to a bigger hospital that had more care options. The COVID-19 cough wreaked havoc on his ability to breathe, and every time he had a coughing spell, he would gasp for air afterwards. It was getting worse, not better.

**At the end of the day, it is God who decides your outcome from this or any other medical emergency you or your loved one may have.**

At the bigger hospital, he was given 50 liters of Optiflow™, a high-flow oxygen therapy. The max they could give was 60 liters. If he needed more than that, ventilating him was the last option. Sleep eluded me for the rest of that night and the next nine while Bruce literally fought for breath in a hospital

across town. The hardest part was knowing he was alone and that I was unable to be with him.

The morning after his transfer, I asked his nurse for a very honest answer about his condition. I hate surprises, and to say I wasn't completely sidelined by this entire turn of events would be a lie. I wanted to be prepared for anything as best I could, but her answer still came as a shock.

“Some people do very well after being ventilated,” she said. “They get better and go home. Others never get off the ventilator and never go back home.”

Why on earth did this happen? Two days prior to being admitted to the hospital, he had accepted a position on staff at a church as its new student life pastor. He was finally getting back to his passion: teaching the Bible to young people. Surely God wasn't finished with him yet. Plus, we were still young. But COVID-19 is not always predictable. It affects everyone differently, and simply being young is no guarantee.

I felt out of control and scared, questioning what would happen. My son, deployed overseas with the Marines, was on standby to come home in case Bruce was ventilated. I had to have a conver-



David Nielsen/Samaritan Ministries

sation with my daughter about life insurance and what the immediate future would look like if something happened. It sounds drastic, especially since he wasn't yet on a ventilator, but I wanted to have the details worked out in the event the unthinkable happened, because I knew I wouldn't be able to make decisions then.

And then I rallied the troops.

I called every friend I had ever made while living in Peoria, Illinois, over the past 28 years and asked them to pray. It wasn't long before Bruce went global. People we didn't know, but with whom I shared a mutual friend, were praying. I heard from people from churches I hadn't attended in over 20 years. Bruce was on prayer chains all over the world. In essence, the Body of Christ stormed the gates of heaven on our behalf and prayed for Bruce's healing and my comfort,

and we felt those prayers.

At one point, I was responding to a text from a cousin whom I hadn't talked to in years, and I remember texting the words, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I know God loves me, and I trust Him." The words came out slowly because I remember thinking, "Do I trust Him? Is that a true statement?"

The response was uncharacteristic for me, a known worrier, to say the least, but an overwhelming peace came over me. I've always wondered how I would respond in a situation like this. Would I blame God or be angry with Him? Would I walk away from my faith? I was still concerned and fervently praying for God to heal my husband, but, at the end of the day, I knew that He loved me and whatever happened was for our good.

Bruce eventually turned a corner, and, as soon as he did, he made

rapid progress. Within 48 hours of being off the Optiflow, he was home with oxygen tanks and a pharmacy's worth of medications. Home is a third-floor apartment that we chose because we liked the view and didn't want any neighbors dancing on our heads. However, those three flights of stairs have proved to be challenging in the months since Bruce came home. For the first two months, he would only leave the apartment if necessary because the thought of climbing back up those stairs proved daunting. Each time he would make it to the top floor, the violent gasping for breath required what we have come to jokingly call "chilling in the oxygen lounge." He needed 15 to 20 minutes to get his breathing down to a manageable level.

*Continued on page 14*

# Finding common grace in Babel 2.0

We can see the work of the Lord and connect with other believers on social media



by Chris Martin  
of Terms of Service

**IN 2013**, I graduated from college with a Biblical literature degree from a well-respected Christian liberal arts school, got married, and entered into a social media role at a large Christian organization. A family member remarked to my wife, “Are you sure Chris should be getting a job in social media? It seems like a fad that may be gone in a few years.”

That year, Facebook boasted about 1.23 billion monthly active users around the world and 73 percent of anyone using the internet was using social media.

Social media wasn’t a fad in 2013, but it’s understandable why it may have felt that way for some onlookers. Social media did not occupy the same sort of mental and social prominence that it does today. World leaders weren’t using social media as an official line of communication in 2013 like they do today. Social justice movements were still primarily organized off social media, not on it. And plenty of social media platforms have been created and dismantled since our family member expressed some skepticism.



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## Babel 2.0

For good and for ill, social media is here to stay. The social internet—all of the different ways in which we communicate with others online—is an unprecedented institution of socialization whose only comparable innovation in recorded history is the Tower of Babel.

In Genesis 11, we are told that the whole world shared the same language. With this same language came a form of corrupted cooperation that could only be the natural offspring of the conspiratorial couple banished from the Garden of Eden. What did people do with their newfound shared lexicon?

Then they said, “Come, let us

build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them (Genesis 11:4-6).

The people of the world had gathered and deployed their novel communication capabilities to embark on an endeavor that would

demonstrate their self-sufficiency, independence, and ingenuity.

God recognized the tremendous power in this communicative innovation of the people and decided He must descend and confuse the language of the builders lest they continue to build their tower and find other ways to pretend they are powerful apart from God.

Sound familiar?

Today, on the social internet and through the varieties of media we consume online, we gather with the people of the world and engage our own novel communication capability in order to fiddle with our own frivolities in an attempt to demonstrate our self-sufficiency, independence, and ingenuity.

The social internet is a tool that, in its earliest days, had a magical feel of unity and progress that created the illusion of seemingly impossible innovation and cooperation. In more recent years, God has used our own folly to introduce the same kind of frustration that the Tower of Babel constructors felt. But despite growing negative sentiment toward different aspects of the social media experience, many of us are still trying to lay bricks and build our virtual towers. We are so consumed by our relationship with the social internet

that it has begun to transform how we think, feel, and believe.

### **Leading is difficult today**

Our relationship with the social internet is profoundly changing us, more often away from Christlike-ness than toward it. The stories I have heard from pastors, parents, and other Christian leaders are heartbreaking. Pastors are watching church members turn into different, unrecognizable people. Parents weep as their children slide into addiction and distress, watching their time with their children slowly slip away.

Leading people to follow Christ has never been an easy calling; countless stories from Church history and the Scriptures themselves make this clear. But that doesn't mean it isn't hard today, too, and that matters. Unlike the construction of the Tower of Babel, God has not stopped the corrupted cooperation we witness on the social internet. Pastors, parents, and other Christian leaders today are trying to figure out how to lead the people they love to put down their hammers and chisels and abandon the selfish social shrine of which they are so proud.

In the midst of all of this, we must remember that God is faith-

ful. Second Peter 1:3 says that the Lord has given us everything we need for life and godliness. With much prayer and Christ-centered cooperation, we can push back the darkness of our modern Babel.

Even with all that, here are three reasons I think we can praise God for the common grace of social media:

### **1. We can see the work of God around the world.**

Today, we can see the amazing work of God around the world by browsing the internet, joining email lists of missions organizations, or simply engaging with brothers and sisters in Christ on our preferred social media platforms. Sure, an ever-present opportunity to be aware of the work of God in the world can tempt us to be overly concerned with matters that are out of our control, but what a grace of God to be able to see His hand move across the world in such miraculous ways simply by scrolling on the screens in our hands!

### **2. We can connect with like-minded followers of Christ.**

I am grateful to God for how the common grace of social media has

*Continued on page 14*

**Sure, an ever-present opportunity to be aware of the work of God in the world can tempt us to be overly concerned with matters that are out of our control, but what a grace of God to be able to see His hand move across the world in such miraculous ways simply by scrolling on the screens in our hands!**

At three months out, pneumonia still shows up on X-rays, as well as scarring on his lungs that may or may not go away. He tires easily, and he hasn't been able to enjoy his favorite activity of biking around the neighborhoods and on the trails. But he finished his last job well and moved into the new one with relative ease, so I'm thankful. Very thankful.

Here's what COVID-19 has taught me:

**1.** Science may be uncertain on this one in some ways, but God is not. Even with studies and more studies on COVID-19, the vaccines, and all the other unknowns surrounding the pandemic, at the end of the day, it

is God who decides your outcome from this or any other medical emergency you or your loved one may have.

**2.** The importance of the Body of Christ cannot be overstated. When it functions as God intended, it is a picture of unity and mutual concern like nothing the world can offer. For me, it was the difference between falling apart and feeling supported. The phone calls, texts, meals, and simple presence of another person sitting with me while I waited by the phone meant more to me than I can say. My only hope of repaying those who supported me in a myriad of different ways is to pay it forward in the future.

The world seems to be getting

darker and darker, and the topic of COVID-19 and everything surrounding it is littered with debate and division. If nothing else, I have been reminded to keep my eyes fixed on Christ, to keep my trust anchored in Him and not what anyone else says, and to continue with what He has called me to. ♦♦♦

Kathryn Nielson is a Communications Specialist at Samaritan Ministries.

acted as a way to keep in touch with brothers and sisters across the world or from past periods of my life when we lived close to one another. And, at the same time, I am grateful for all the relationships the Lord has given me that have almost exclusively taken place through various social internet avenues. There are dozens of brothers and sisters in Christ I have interacted with on Twitter or Facebook or elsewhere that I will not meet in person until we dine together at the marriage supper of the Lamb. How amazing is that?! Praise God for such an opportunity.

### **3. We can study the beliefs and culture of all kinds of people.**

How cool is it that we can use the internet to learn? Even more specif-

ically, we can use social media to learn! Social media doesn't just have to be all about political arguments and funny cat videos. Simply by spending time on social media and interacting with people who are unlike you, you can learn about how different people live and what they believe. Maybe you'll never make it to India and experience the richness of Indian culture, but if you happen to connect with an Indian person on social media, you could engage in conversation with them about what they believe and what a typical day looks like for them, and learn how their life is different from yours.

### **It comes down to wisdom**

Maintaining a healthy relationship with the social internet comes

down to wisdom. Because of our sin, our default mode of using the internet and social media is characterized by the brokenness that has so scarred our hearts. Social media isn't all bad, but it is a broken tool made by sinful people and used by sinful people. We must be vigilant in clinging to Christ and relying on the Holy Spirit to lead us in wisdom as we use this powerful communication tool. May God help us. ♦♦♦

Chris Martin publishes the email newsletter Terms of Service (TermsOfService.social).

## Prayer for the Persecuted Church



(iStock)

### Persecution sweeps across state in India

Persecution of Christians in India's Uttar Pradesh state has been surging, International Christian Concern reports. Ten separate incidents of persecution, including beatings and imprisonment, were recorded in the first 10 days of September. The surge began after two Muslim men were accused in June of forcibly converting 1,000 Hindus to Islam. A radical Hindu party used the incident to incite nationalists into action. Since then, at least 30 incidents of persecution have been documented, and at least 71 pastors and other Christians taken into police custody on accusations by Hindus. *Pray for safety for Christians in Uttar Pradesh state and for police to properly carry out their duties.*

### Christian high school raided in China

Chinese police raided a Christian music high school in Harbin, Heilongjiang, on September 4, VOM-C says. All staff and students were arrested, with all but the principal released in 24 hours. Various school possessions were confiscated. *Pray that students and staff will be able to resume classes and for the safety of Principal Xu and his family.*

### Saudi Christian leaves country

A Christian man referred to as "A" or "Adam" facing charges in Saudi Arabia was able to rejoin his family in another location, VOM-C reports. *Pray for Adam, his family, and all Christians who have suffered for their beliefs in Saudi Arabia.* ♦♦♦



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**Remember those  
who are in prison,  
as though in  
prison with them,  
and those who  
are mistreated,  
since you also are  
in the body.**

**HEBREWS 13:3**

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Our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. We need to remember them in prayer and action.

Each month, we will provide updates and offer prayer points gleaned from a variety of sources. Please use them in your prayer time and possibly to seek other ways, small or large to supplement our prayers with action.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
ON THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:**

International Christian Concern  
[persecution.org](http://persecution.org)  
800-422-5441

World Watch Monitor  
[worldwatchmonitor.org](http://worldwatchmonitor.org)

# Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day ... **Ephesians 6:13a**

✂ Detach and place it on your refrigerator

## THE DOORPOST

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9; 11:18-21



Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

### EPHESIANS 6:13

**JESUS HAS GIVEN US** everything we need to withstand the evil confronting us.

The enemies we face are not flesh and blood, although they often work through humans. We face unseen spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places—rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness.

We have cosmic enemies. We need cosmic weapons, and Jesus has provided them—Truth, Righteousness from Him, readiness from the Gospel of Peace, Faith, Salvation, His Word. These weapons have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4).

We must take up all the weapons He has given us, praying at all times in the Spirit, keeping alert with all perseverance, and making supplication for all the saints, at home, in neighboring communities, across the nation, and around the world.

The days were evil because of the cosmic forces of darkness when Paul wrote these words, and they are still evil today for the same reason. The same weapons from God are available to us today when we take them on. With them we can do everything that is needed and stand firm in the evil day.



For the Kingdom,  
Ray King